



United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS Helps The Trust for Public Lands Conserve Important Farmland Along the Connecticut River

With Contributions from The Trust for Public Lands, the Robie Farm web page, and Sue Knight, NRCS Technical Program Specialist



The Robie Farm is a small family-run dairy farm located on the banks of the Connecticut River in Piermont, New Hampshire. Six generations of Robies have farmed this property since 1870. Lee and Betty Sue run the dairy operation. Freeman, Lee's oldest son, is the field and barn man, and Mark, the youngest son, is the artisan cheese maker. Tim and Neil, two more sons, help out from time to time. Robie Farm sells raw milk, artisanal cheese, eggs, and humanely raised meats at their own store and at over fifty retail stores and restaurants.

The family worked with The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and local conservationists to protect their farm with a conservation easement that would prevent development. As the value of land for residences has skyrocketed (the farm is a short drive from Dartmouth College), many fields that used to grow cattle now have condos and homes. TPL worked with the USDA's Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (now the Agriculture Land Easement program) and the New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, as well as private donors to conserve this irreplaceable New Hampshire farm.

USDA Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) help New Hampshire farmers keep their productive land in agriculture in perpetuity by providing matching funds with cooperating entities to place a conservation easement on the land. ALE easements protect entire working farms, woodlands, wetlands, important natural areas, and historical and cultural resources. USDA Agricultural Land Easements establish partnerships with land trusts, state and local unit of government, and other non-profit organizations, to facilitate and provide funding for the purchase of conservation easements on land in New Hampshire. Landowners participate voluntarily and protected land remains in

private ownership. The property owner still owns the land and retains the right to sell it, lease it, or will it to his or her heirs. Participating landowners agree not to convert their land to commercial enterprises other than agriculture and forestry and to develop and implement a conservation plan for any highly erodible land. To qualify for ALE, the land offered must: be a minimum of 50% productive agricultural soils; or have historical or cultural resources; have the





United States Department of Agriculture

easement purchased through partnerships with state and local units of government, land trusts, or other non-profit organizations; be privately owned, and cannot be town, state, or nationally owned; be owned by an individual or entity that does not exceed the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitation; have less than 2/3 forestland or have 1/3 open land.

Since the ALE (formerly FRPP) came into existence in 1996, NRCS in New Hampshire has provided over \$30 million to support the purchase of, and provide permanent protection of just over 7,800 acres of agricultural land on over 117 farms across the State. The \$30 million in Federal funds leveraged nearly \$55 million in local funds and \$8.5 million in landowner contributions for a total easement value of \$93.5 million. The NRCS share of the Robie Farm easement was \$187,500. The farm ownership is 140.58 acres, with 122.21 acres eased under the USDA NRCS Agricultural Land Easement program, of which +/-57 acres are prime, statewide, or locally important farmland.



Unique to this easement are 2 deed-required nonagricultural management areas. One is a minimum 50' riparian buffer along the Connecticut River, totaling 5.1 acres. It shall remain in permanent vegetative cover and is intended to protect bank stability, enhance wildlife and fisheries habitats, and improve water quality. The second is the additional protection of the "Bean Brook Wetland Area", at the confluence of Bean Brook and the Connecticut River. This wetland complex holds special wildlife value. The priority for management within this area will favor wildlife habitat over agricultural production.



Protection of the farm ensures that some of the most highly ranked agricultural land in New Hampshire remains in production. It allows the family to expand its dairy products for the local-foods movement. The land is forever protected from development, including keeping homes from being built along the farm's mile-long Connecticut River shoreline. The easement conserves riparian habitat that is also ranked as the highest quality in New Hampshire's Wildlife Action Plan.